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Biden features victim resources in marking National Crime Victims' Rights Week

Wilmington – Attorney General Beau Biden marked National Crime Victims' Rights Week today by discussing his office's efforts to do more to help victims rebuild their lives. Since taking over responsibility for the Victims' Compensation Assistance Program last year, the Department of Justice has significantly increased the amount of financial aid given to victims and their families. The funding, which does not come from taxpayer dollars, covers a variety of expenses incurred by victims. Biden also said the Program has expanded its operations with a new office to serve New Castle County and Wilmington residents, and expanded outreach to downstate victims and families.

"At the Department of Justice, we are committed to protecting the most vulnerable among us, from children and the elderly to people with disabilities and victims of crime, Biden said at the new Victims' Compensation Assistance Program (VCAP) offices on King Street in Wilmington. "National Crime Victims' Rights Week is an important time for us to acknowledge the struggles of crime victims, celebrate their triumphs over the adversity of victimization, and stand shoulder to shoulder with them as we fight back together."

Biden explained that Department of Justice services to victims of crime and their families do not end with the prosecution of offenders. He reviewed VCAP's expanded outreach, the long-standing role of the Department's Victim/Witness Services Unit, and legislation he is supporting this year to strengthen protections for victims statewide. Specifically:

- VCAP, which became part of the Department in July 2009 and moved into new offices in downtown Wilmington in December 2009, is an important resource for victims on their road to recovery. VCAP is funded through surcharges on court fines and penalties, as well as federal grants. These funds pay expenses such as mental health counseling, medical bills, lost wages, and moving and relocating services for victims of domestic violence. Through streamlining and enhanced outreach from help desks at courthouses and Department of Justice offices in each county, VCAP has reached more Delawareans than ever before. Biden announced that VCAP expects to end the current fiscal year with more than 1,100 applications for assistance – a 60% increase over last year. Moreover, the Program has awarded over \$2.3 million to victims so far this fiscal year, more than was distributed in all of last year.
- The Department of Justice Victim/Witness Services Unit, part of the Department's Criminal Division, helps victims, witnesses, and their families navigate through the criminal justice process, which can be complicated, confusing, and even intimidating. This team consists of Social Workers and support personnel who assist victims and witnesses with counseling, referrals for medical or psychological treatment, transportation, and something that is often

overlooked in the process – encouragement. The unit also provides case notification and outreach to thousands of Delawareans affected by crime every year.

- The Department has helped craft important legislation that will make the law work harder for victims of crime, including House Bill 336, which strengthens Protection for Abuse Orders and allows for their extension indefinitely in the worst cases, and House Bill 348, which strengthens penalties for more than 60 crimes committed against vulnerable or infirm adults.

Learn more about the Victims' Compensation Assistance Program and other Department of Justice services for victims by visiting www.attorneygeneral.delaware.gov.

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